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CIA told to prove claim

The Central Intelligence Agency has been ordered to prove its claim that it complied with the law in its response to a Freedom of Information request from Syracuse University's student newspaper.

The Daily Orange sued the CIA to obtain documents relating to alleged CIA activity on campus during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The agency, as a partial settlement to the federal lawsuit, released 18,000 pages of documents relating to overt CIA activities. The

documents shed light on research contracts and correspondence between the CIA and the SU placement office. However, the CIA refused to confirm or deny the existence of any covert activities. The agency then asked U.S. District Judge Howard G. Munson to throw out the lawsuit on the grounds the agency had complied with FOI requirements.

Munson instead told the CIA yesterday to submit within 60 days an affidavit demonstrating that it had in fact complied with the law. The judge said he would examine the affidavit in private, so no national security secrets would leak out.

Munson said he also has the right to decide whether an internal CIA memorandum from Nov. 4, 1975, is exempt from release under FOIA, as the CIA has claimed. The memo, the judge wrote, "refers to the names of individuals whom the agency was interested in contacting for the purpose of discussing academic programs."

The judge granted the CIA's motion that several CIA documents need not be released to the Daily Orange, including reports of inspection visits by agents to Syracuse Research Corp. and the dollar amounts of research contracts between the university and the CIA.

The judge denied a motion by the Daily Orange to amend its lawsuit to

include two professors — one of whom says he was spied on by the agency in the late 1960s and early 1970s — who claim the CIA's refusal to release the documents constitutes a threat to academic freedom.

The lawsuit started in 1977, when then-managing editor Howard Mansfield sent an FOI request to the CIA, asking for information pertaining to work Professor William Coplin, director of the Public Affairs Department of SU's Maxwell School of Citizenship, had done for the agency. Coplin said he was asked by the agency to test out a model another academician had built for predicting social unrest in Third World countries.

Mansfield wanted information about whether professors at SU were recruiting students on behalf of the CIA, and whether SU had participated in a CIA drug-testing program that had surfaced at other college campuses. Mansfield also submitted a broad request for general information about the SU-CIA relationship.

The CIA replied it would need more time — Mansfield set a 10-day deadline — to see whether the material had to be released under the FOIA. After several delays, Mansfield and Scot French, who had become managing editor, filed suit.

An agreement eventually was reached under which the CIA released the 18,000 pages of material — information that Daily Orange attorneys said was inconsequential. They pursued the case, and the CIA filed the motion to dismiss that Munson decided yesterday.